

Retiree's KDHE Work Touches Home

By Phil Breedlove, Jr.

One of the most ironic and emotional times of Art Turner's career and life was when he, managing HIV Counseling and Testing sites, found out his 28-year-old son was infected with HIV.

"I was devastated," Turner said. "HIV is such a cruel thing to happen to anyone." Now with almost 14 years of faithful service to the state of Kansas, Turner reflects back on the good and bad of his career as he prepares to hang up his hat one last time on Sept. 13.

After graduating from Washburn University with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration in 1965, Turner tried his luck in several corporate areas, including retail, health insurance and direct mail advertising. He spent approximately 15 years as a pilot before changing gears and joining forces with the "State."

Turner first entered into state employment in 1991 at the University of Kansas Medical Center as a unit clerk in Kansas City. After a year and a half he returned to Topeka to work with Child Care Licensing. Later he joined HIV Prevention in surveillance and then working with HIV counseling and testing sites.

"We had arranged to meet and go to dinner. As he arrived, he opened his shirt cuff and removed a cotton ball on a bandage. I asked what it was for. 'I'm HIV positive,' he blurted out... 'I've been HIV positive for about three years.' I could have fallen over."

Turner said his son assumed he had known because he worked with HIV data every day. He explained to his son how secure medical information is at KDHE so there was little chance of him discovering it on his own.

Since that time, Turner's son has gone public with his HIV case and spoken at several conferences in Kansas and gets questions from his Web site from around the world. He has a Web site describing his daily struggle with the illness.



Art Turner (left) accepts retirement best wishes from KDHE Secretary Roderick Bremby.

"My son serves as an inspiration for a lot of what I do," Turner said.

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Turner was also part of a team that founded a group affectionately known as SMG: Spill My Guts Group. The group is an outlet for sharing his work experiences with those that will do his job after retirement.

One bit of wisdom Turner would like to pass on to the next generation is to be open but cautious when approaching new technologies. He advises people to be anxious to explore new technologies and new ways of doing things, but don't jump in feet first, especially when that technology hasn't been tested.

"Keep up with the technology, but if you get a new test that may be lousy, you don't want to use it. It's great to be the first, have the most, be the best and be on the cutting edge of technology, but not at the expense of accuracy."

Turner said his retirement is not the end, but the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. He plans to go to work on his 60 ft. by 120 ft. ranch (his house). He'd also consider a part-time job as a retail-store greeter or "something to keep me from driving my wife up the wall."